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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY POPE 9848

RUEHHR/AMEMBASSY TEHRAN 2140

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E.O. 12065: RDS-3 5/21/79 (TOOK, MALCOLM) OR-M

TAGS: AF, UN, WOPS, PFRP, PINT

SUBJECT: (C) AFGHANISTAN: PROSPECTS FOR SOVIET INTERVENTION

REF: (A) KABIL 1626, (B) MOSCOW 5384

1. (C) SUMMARY. WE DO NOT THINK THAT THE SOVIET UNION UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES VIEWS ITS OPTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN AS OPEN-ENDED. IN OUR OPINION, ANALOGIES WITH THE 1968 SOVIET INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA ARE FAULTY. WE THINK THE SOVIETS WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE THEIR ADVISORY AND LOGISTICAL MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE PRO-SOVIET KABUL REGIME. SOME SOVIET PERSONNEL MAY BECOME INVOLVED IN DRA MILITARY OPERATIONS, UNDER FORESEEABLE CIRCUMSTANCES, HOWEVER, MOSCOW WILL PREPARELY AVOID SHOULDERING A SUBSTANTIAL PART OF THE ANTI-SUPREMACY COMBAT BURDEN IN AFGHANISTAN. ~~END SUMMARY.~~

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2. (C) WE AGREE WITH THE MAIN TENETS OF KABUL'S ANALYSIS (REF 4), IN PARTICULAR WITH THE CONCLUSION THAT THE SOVIETS WILL PROBABLY ATTEMPT TO AVOID PLUNGING INTO WHAT WILL BECOME A VIETNAM-TYPE TRAP. IN FACT, WE WOULD COULD FURTHER IN DOWNPLAYING THE VALIDITY OF THE CZECH ANALOGY. AS MENTIONED REF 5, IN OUR OPINION THE SOVIETS WILL NOT UNDER FORESEEABLE CIRCUMSTANCES GIVE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO THE LARGE-SCALE DISPATCH OF COMBAT UNITS WHICH IN THE CASE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA INVOLVED SOME 141 SOVIET DIVISIONS PLUS FOUR DIVISIONS FROM OTHER WARSAW PACT COUNTRIES TO SAVE THE KHALQI REGIME FROM BEING OVERTHROWN.

3. (C) OUR CONCLUSION IS BASED ON SEVERAL PREMISES:

(A) STRATEGICALLY, AFGHANISTAN IS IN AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT CATEGORY FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA. CZECHOSLOVAKIA SITS ASTRIDE OR IS NEAR HISTORIC INVASION CORRIDORS INTO RUSSIA/THE SOVIET UNION. IT IS A MEMBER OF THE EX "SOCIALIST COMMONWEALTH", THE "WORLD SOCIALIST SYSTEM" AS WELL AS THE WARSAW PACT, AND CHANGES IN ITS INTERNAL SYSTEM CAN IMPACT RELATIVELY DIRECTLY UPON THE USSR'S INTERNAL SYSTEM.

Czech non-analogy

(B) FROM THE MOSCOW PERSPECTIVE, AND ESPECIALLY IN THE UPCOMING MONTHS, A SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN WOULD PROBABLY REDUND TO THE DISADVANTAGE OF GLOBAL STRATEGIC INTERESTS. IT WOULD DEAL A SEVERE BLOW TO DETENTE WITH THE WEST AT A TIME WHEN MOSCOW IS INCREASINGLY PRE-OCCUPIED WITH THE GROWING CHINESE THREAT IN THE EAST. SUCH A MOVE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BACKFIRE. IT WOULD PROVIDE EXCELLENT (AND, AS IN THE CASE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA, LONG-TERM) TRUST FOR CHARGES BY THE CHINESE AND OTHERS OF SOVIET EX-PANSIONIST, HEGEMONIST OBJECTIVES IN THE WORLD. IT WOULD STRAIN RELATIONS WITH THE IMPORTANT MUSLIM WORLD.

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(C) IN 1968 THE SOVIETS CALCULATED CORRECTLY THAT THE CZECHS WOULD NOT FIGHT. THIS WOULD NOT HAPPEN IN THE CASE OF AFGHANISTAN. FURTHER, THE SOVIET OBJECTIVE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA WAS EASILY ACCOMPLISHED BY OCCUPYING AND PACIFYING THE URBAN CENTERS. MOSCOW'S TASK WOULD BE MORE DIFFICULT IN AFGHANISTAN WHERE THE GREAT BULK OF THE POPULATION--AND THE RESISTANCE--ARE LOCATED IN RURAL AREAS. IT IS EVEN POSSIBLE THAT THE INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN WOULD RECEIVE ADDED IMPETUS BY

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THE DIRECT COMMITMENT OF SOVIET TROOPS AND THE
 SURVIVABILITY OF THE NORTH-VIETNAM TROOPS ARE INCREAS-
 INGLY DEPENDENT ON THE CONTINUITY OF THE US IN COMBAT
 OF SUCH TROOPS.

CO) JUST IN TERMS OF PREPARING MILITARILY FOR SUCH ACTION, THE SOVIETS WOULD FRET THE AFGHANISTAN SITUATION IN SOME DAYS MORE COMPLICATED THAN THAT THEY CONFRONTED IN JULY AND AUGUST 1969. THE PREPARATION FOR THE CZECHOSLOVAK INVASION WAS EFFECTIVELY COVERED BY LARGE-SCALE COMBAT, COMMAND AND LOGISTICAL EXERCISES IN THE ESTABLISHED FRAMEWORK OF THE WARSAW PACT. THUS THE NECESSARY GROUND WORK OF RECONNAISSANCE, LOGISTICS BASING AND COMMAND AND CONTROL PROCEDURES WAS LAID, AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE REQUIRED MOBILIZATION AND DEPLOYMENT OF FORCES WAS ACCOMPLISHED UNDER THE COVER OF COMPARATIVELY ROUTINE MANEUVERS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONCEIVE OF AN EFFECTIVE, COMPARABLE "SCENARIO" IN THE CASE OF AFGHANISTAN. THE CONCENTRATION OF FORCES NECESSARY FOR A CZECHOSLOVAK-STYLE OPERATION IN AFGHANISTAN WOULD PROBABLY REQUIRE LARGE-SCALE MOBILIZATION AND REDEPLOYMENT OF TROOPS IN THE CONTIGUOUS AREAS, ALTHOUGH TO SOME EXTENT THESE PROBLEMS WOULD BE ORVIATED BY ALSO DEPLOYING AIRBORNE DIVISIONS. STRETCHING THE POINT TO INCLUDE ALL OF THE TWO MILITARY DISTRICTS HAVING SOME COMMON BORDER WITH AFGHANISTAN, THE SOVIETS HAVE ELEVEN DIVISIONS, ONLY THREE OF WHICH CAN BE CONSIDERED READY FOR COMBAT WITHOUT MOBILIZATION. NONE OF THE THREE IS IDEALLY POSITIONED FOR AN AFGHANISTAN MISSION, AND THEY STILL HAVE TO CONSIDER THE CHINESE BORDER WHICH IS THE MAJOR CONSIDERATION OF AT LEAST ONE OF THE MILITARY DISTRICTS.

4. (C) IT IS OF COURSE NOT POSSIBLE AND WOULD BE FOOLISH FOR US TO RULE OUT COMPLETELY THE POSSIBILITY OF A SOVIET INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN IN RESPONSE TO AN APPEAL FROM A BELEAGUERED KHALQI REGIME. WHILE WE BELIEVE THAT THE DISINCENTIVES IN TERMS OF MOSCOW'S CALCULATION OR ITS BEST INTERESTS AT THIS TIME APPEAR HEAVILY TO OUTWEIGH THE INCENTIVES, THE FACTORS ADVANCED BY KABUL IN PARA 11 REF A ARE STILL COGENT. IF THE POLITICAL-MILITARY SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE, THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP MAY VERY WELL BE TEMPTED TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME LESSER FORM OF DIRECT INTERVENTION TO PROTECT ITS OVERALL INVESTMENT IN AFGHANISTAN. FOR THIS REASON IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO CONTINUE TO GIVE OCCASIONAL REMINDERS TO THE SOVIETS OF THE SERIOUS VIEW WE WOULD TAKE OF ANY SUCH ACTIONS. REMINDERS FROM WESTERN AND THIRD-WORLD GOVERNMENTS CONSTITUTE IN THEMSELVES DISINCENTIVES TO DIRECT INTERVENTION.

5. (C) SHORT OF DIRECT, LARGE-SCALE SOVIET MILITARY INTERVENTION, WHAT IS THE LIKELY NATURE AND SCOPE OF SOVIET MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN? THE AFGHAN MILITARY'S ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY MAY WELL BE THE ONLY LIMITATION AT THIS TIME ON HOW FAR THE SOVIETS ARE WILLING TO GO. WE BELIEVE THE NUMBER OF SOVIET ADVISERS COULD PROGRESSIVELY INCREASE, AND SOME COULD BECOME INVOLVED IN MILITARY OPERATIONS. SOME SOVIET FIRE SUPPORT COULD BE PROVIDED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE FORM OF HELICOPTER GUNSHIP OR TACTICAL AIR SUPPORT FOR GROUND OPERATIONS, OR THE EMPLOYMENT OF SOVIET PERSONNEL TO OPERATE SOPHISTICATED MILITARY EQUIPMENT. THIS WOULD ALL BE IN THE CONTEXT, HOWEVER, OF AFGHAN AND NOT SOVIET TROOPS SHOULDERING THE COMBAT BURDEN IN A SITUATION WHERE THE DEAF'S OWN CAPABILITIES TO SURVIVE AND EXPAND ITS CONTROL --AND NOT MOSCOW'S DIRECT INTERVENTION-- WILL BE THE CHIEF DETERMINANTS OF THE DESTINY OF THE AFGHAN.

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